



## **Indianapolis Symphonic Choir announces Augusta Read Thomas as newest commissioned composer, work to premiere in 2022**

*Choir's dedicated commitment to commissioned work underscores ongoing support and recognition of the world's top living composers*

INDIANAPOLIS (May 12, 2020) – One of the nation's oldest and most established symphonic choruses, the Indianapolis Symphonic Choir announces renowned composer Augusta Read Thomas as its newest commissioned composer, with plans to premiere her work for chorus and orchestra in spring 2022. The announcement marks the third major commission for the Indianapolis Symphonic Choir in 18 years, following Kyle Gann's "Transcendental Sonnets" in 2002, and Mohammed Fairouz's "Zabur" in 2014, which the Choir subsequently performed at New York's famed Carnegie Hall and recorded via Naxos Records.

A three-year process, the plans for a commissioned composer have long been a part of the organization's strategic planning and fundraising efforts, made possible in part by the generosity of the Lilly Endowment and the Allen Whitehill Clowes Charitable Foundation. Early on, following discussion with leading professionals in the choral world including conductors, directors and music professors from many of the country's leading musical institutions, the Choir focused on plans to engage a female composer in recognition of the significant yet still too infrequently heard work among this growing group of individuals.

"I am incredibly honored and excited to have the opportunity to present a new work by much-heralded composer Augusta Read Thomas," said Indianapolis Symphonic Choir Artistic Director Eric Stark. "We are very proud to be partnering with a composer of worldwide stature, recognized depth and boundless promise, who has written works for the Chicago and Boston symphonies, the Berlin Philharmonic, the Cleveland Orchestra and the Washington Choral Arts Society. Just as we cherish the chance to 'preserve' the great works of the past by masters such as Bach, Beethoven and Mozart, we are equally committed to providing an opportunity to experience and support new works by the world's top living composers. Our work together will help us extend our reach into the future by ensuring a place for new compositions."

An influential teacher at Eastman, Northwestern, Tanglewood, and Aspen Music Festival, Thomas is only the 16th person to be designated University Professor at the University of Chicago (one of only eight currently holding the title). Thomas was the longest-serving Mead Composer-in-Residence with the Chicago Symphony, for Daniel Barenboim and Pierre Boulez, from 1997 through 2006. This residency culminated in the premiere of "Astral Canticle," one of two finalists for the 2007 Pulitzer Prize in Music. During her residency, Thomas not only premiered nine commissioned orchestral works, but was also central in establishing the thriving MusicNOW series through which she commissioned and programmed the work of many living composers. Thomas was named the 2016 Chicagooan of the Year.

Recent and upcoming commissions include those from the Santa Fe Opera in collaboration with the San Francisco Opera and other opera companies, PEAK Performances at Montclair State University and the Martha Graham Dance Company, The Cathedral Choral Society of Washington D.C., The Indianapolis Symphony, Tanglewood, The Kaleidoscope Chamber Orchestra, Des Moines Symphony, Boston Symphony, the Utah Symphony, Wigmore Hall in London, JACK quartet, Third Coast Percussion,

Spektral Quartet, Chicago Philharmonic, Eugene Symphony, the Danish Chamber Players, and the Fromm Foundation. She won the Ernst von Siemens Music Prize, among many other coveted awards. She is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

“Composing for voice is a huge passion and as a result the largest part of my catalogue is music for voice(s),” said Thomas. “The human voice — possibly the most subtle, complex, and fragile yet forceful, flexible, seductive, and persuasive carrier of musical ideas and meanings — has always been an inspiration for and influence upon my entire musical thinking. I sing as I compose. When musicians ask me a question, I sing the answer.

“For every artist, in whatever area of creative endeavor, the receipt of a commission stirs the life force,” continued Thomas. “Commissioning new art is leap-of-faith; the commissioner does not know what they will receive. I feel profoundly fortunate for the Indianapolis Symphonic Choir’s investment in my life’s work. I cherish the collaboration with each and every musician in the Symphonic Choir family and look forward to devoting my strongest, focused efforts to sculpting this new composition.”

In addition to her upcoming work for the Indianapolis Symphonic Choir, the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra will premiere her work “Sun Dance” on October 2, 2020.

Composers are invited to contact the Indianapolis Symphonic Choir at any time to share news of recent compositions and explore possible collaborations in the future. For more information, visit [www.indychoir.org](http://www.indychoir.org).

#### **About the Indianapolis Symphonic Choir**

The Indianapolis Symphonic Choir, celebrating its 84th season in 2020-2021, is proud to be one of the nation’s most established and dynamic musical institutions. Among the most active symphonic choruses in the United States, the Choir reaches more than 20,000 persons each season through performances and education & community engagement programs. The 180 volunteer singers demonstrate the Choir’s commitment to musical excellence through their talent and dedication during each 11-month season. The Indianapolis Symphonic Choir was founded in 1937 at the request of the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra to perform the great choral-orchestral repertoire. This continued partnership exhibits the very best of collaborative ideals – two independent arts organizations combining their strengths to create beautifully lasting musical results. Following the Indianapolis Symphonic Choir’s acclaimed performance at Carnegie Hall during the 2016-17 season, the group traveled to Washington D.C.’s Kennedy Center as a guest of the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra during the SHIFT festival in April 2018. The Choir’s latest recording, *Festival of Carols*, was released by Naxos in 2019 and features two-time Grammy Award-winning artist Sylvia McNair. The Choir is dedicated to excellence in the performance of choral music, the creation of new choral masterworks, and to community outreach and education. For more information about the Symphonic Choir, visit [www.indychoir.org](http://www.indychoir.org).

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